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FORTY-NINTH SESSION

Official Records

SPECIAL POLITICAL AND DECOLONIZATION COMMITTEE (FOURTH COMMITTEE)
14th meeting
held on
Monday, 31 October 1994
at 3 p.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 14th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. HUDYMA (Ukraine)

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AGENDA ITEM 80: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 80: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (continued) (A/49/21, A/49/385, A/49/472)

1. Mr. KAWAI (Japan) said that on the eve of its fiftieth anniversary, the United Nations needed to reinvigorate its activities in the area of public information. To that end, it should develop close cooperation with entities outside the United Nations system, including non-governmental organizations and the media. The Department of Public Information should explore the possibility of undertaking more projects jointly with media partners and should present the Committee with concrete proposals in that respect. Currently, such arrangements were made on an ad hoc basis, but they should become a more regular feature of the Department's promotional activities.

2. The information capabilities of United Nations field missions should be strengthened, and the Department should make an active contribution in that regard. Experience in Cambodia demonstrated that public information activities played an important role in fostering the local population's understanding of the functions performed by a peace-keeping mission. An effective information component tailored to meet specific needs was necessary. As suggested by the Special Committee on Peace-keeping Operations, qualified personnel should be available for that purpose, and appropriate training should be conducted. Also a mechanism should be devised to enable the host country to provide the mission with information on developments in the field.

3. Despite its financially limited resources, the Department of Public Information offered a wide variety of valuable publications. There was much room for improvement, however, in the current system of producing and circulating United Nations publications, and their informational and fund-raising potential should be more fully explored.

4. By affording the public easy access to United Nations materials, depository libraries in Member States could be important sources of United Nations information. His delegation welcomed the decision to designate the library of Chuo University in Tokyo as a new depository library. His Government had recently agreed to cooperate with the Dag Hammarskjöld Library on a project to conduct a systematic survey of depository libraries in Japan. A librarian from Headquarters would visit Japanese libraries to assess their condition and make recommendations for their improved functioning. His delegation called on other Member States to consider making more effective use of depository libraries in their countries.

5. His delegation supported the draft decision contained in the report of the Committee on Information (A/49/21), and the amendment to it.

6. Mr. TELLES RIBEIRO (Brazil) said that in the new international situation, the Department of Public Information was well placed to improve public awareness of the work performed by the Organization, thereby assisting it in mustering support from various constituencies. The fiftieth anniversary was an ideal opportunity for advocacy in favour of the Organization.

7. The Department had some notable successes to its credit. The important role it had played, through its campaigns, in the achievement of a united, non-racial and democratic South Africa, should be duly recognized. The presence in the Committee of a delegation from South Africa was a useful reminder of the power of information and of its capacity to conquer hearts and minds and make a real difference.

8. A number of mandated activities relating to the establishment of information centres in developing countries remained unfulfilled; there was a growing awareness of the imbalances in the allocation of resources among the different information centres, and of the importance of such centres, particularly in countries with less developed information and communications capabilities. His delegation had therefore associated itself with other developing countries in seeking to redress those imbalances. It noted with satisfaction that the Secretariat, within the meagre resources at its disposal, was taking steps to assign human and material resources to ensure that all outstanding mandates were implemented and was introducing measures to effect savings in certain information centres. The Secretariat should take into account the importance of additional funding for information centres in developing countries when making decisions regarding the use of resources resulting from those savings.

9. In the process of integrating information centres into United Nations field offices, the Secretariat should ensure their functional independence and the integral fulfilment of their respective mandates. Furthermore, such integration should be pursued on a case-by-case basis and at the request or with the consent of the host State.

10. It was regrettable that Development Forum had been discontinued; his delegation hoped that once resources were made available, its publication could be resumed. The suggestion that the Department of Public Information should issue publications on peace-keeping operations should be approached with caution, since such operations relied on their own resources to pursue their public information policies.

11. The Committee on Information had failed to capitalize on the concepts set out in General Assembly resolution 45/76 A; consensus on those concepts had been reached after protracted debates and had been the result of a political compromise between developed and developing countries. Few countries had submitted their views in response to the requests formulated in successive resolutions. His delegation called upon all Member States, particularly the developing countries, to present their views so as to provide guidance to the Committee on how best to proceed. The desire of a number of countries to join

the Committee on Information was a sign of the prestige and importance of the Committee's work.

12. Mr. YARKA (Papua New Guinea) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 by the representative of Algeria. It supported the efforts of the United Nations to establish an effective information and communications network, especially in developing countries, and to adopt measures aimed at reducing the existing disparities in information flows to individuals, communities and the public at large.

13. Information played an important role in the functioning of the Organization. Concentrated media focus on selective issues could mobilize public opinion leading to swift action by the United Nations, while lack of adequate media focus resulted in less attention by the United Nations, since there was no pressure from public opinion. Media coverage of tragic civil wars and humanitarian situations in various parts of the world had enabled people to see for themselves the role of the United Nations in peace-keeping operations and humanitarian missions and shown what the Organization was capable of achieving with the resources available.

14. His delegation was pleased that the Department of Public Information had initiated a number of positive steps, within the constraints of available resources, to ensure that its goals and objectives were achieved. Efforts should be made to upgrade and strengthen regional United Nations information offices; those offices must maintain close liaison with regional Governments and media organizations in the collation and dissemination of information.

15. Papua New Guinea was proud that there was an absolutely free and vigorously active press in its pluralistic society, which had diverse cultures and over 800 different spoken languages. Information and communications infrastructures were vital for developing countries, serving as a catalyst for democracy, economic development and social progress; international support for the further improvement of those infrastructures was extremely important for the overall development process.

16. The Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States had placed the concerns of small islands on the international agenda; through the efforts of the Conference, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the private sector, journalists and non-governmental organizations from the South Pacific region had been able to participate. His delegation hoped that there would be more partnerships of that type and that the Department of Public Information would look at innovative ways of ensuring that the South Pacific region was kept abreast of developments. The isolation of small island States was a major constraint to social and economic development; in the Pacific region, it was often very difficult for information to reach remote and isolated islands and atolls. Efforts needed to be enhanced, at both the national and regional levels, to improve the media infrastructure and communications technology in developing countries, especially in the areas of training and dissemination of information. Regional media services such as the Pacific News had been formed with a view to increasing coverage of national and

regional issues; however, lack of resources among recipients of the service often hindered the flow of information. The success of national and regional efforts would largely depend on the support received from the international community, particularly for practical training programmes for journalists, broadcasters and technicians involved in the various media industries. Increased bilateral and international support and assistance was also needed in providing appropriate communications technology suited to both local and regional needs and conditions, including programme material, especially for radio and television.

17. Papua New Guinea fully supported the efforts being undertaken by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in the development and promotion of the public and private media.

18. Mr. ZVANKO (Belarus) said that in a rapidly changing world, information had a powerful influence on social, cultural, political and economic changes as a vital component of the mechanism for maintaining peace, democracy and development. Through the development of the communications media, information was a powerful means of influencing public opinion. The free dissemination of information and access to it by all States with weak economic potential played a vital role in strengthening democracy in those States and promoting socio-economic development.

19. Belarus attached great importance to the principle of freedom of information. The recently adopted first Constitution of the Republic established the right of each citizen to receive and disseminate full, accurate and timely information on any questions. The parliament of Belarus had adopted in first reading a draft law on the press and other mass information media that would ensure freedom of speech and of the press and guarantee the right of citizens to participate in the information process. The law also laid down the rights and duties of journalists and measures for their legal and social protection.

20. Broad consideration was being given to a draft framework for the development of information in Belarus based on the idea of the freedom of the mass media as one of the main guarantees of human freedoms and the democratic development of society. Under the draft, censorship and political, economic and administrative control of the mass media were prohibited. Already most press bodies were financially and administratively independent of the authorities.

21. His delegation supported measures to rationalize and improve the work of the Department of Public Information. While recognizing the special situation of developing countries, especially the least developed countries, his delegation drew attention to the need to include in information programmes for stable development the study of economic problems in countries with transitional economies as well. During the general debate in plenary the Prime Minister of Belarus had proposed the holding of a United Nations conference on the stable development of States with transitional economies. If that initiative was acted on, the Department would have to plan and implement information measures for the conference. His delegation supported the request of the representative of the

Russian Federation for the broader use of Russian in publications by the Department, since most of the population of Belarus, and also of other countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, used Russian in daily life.

22. His delegation welcomed the organization of the 1994 Training Programme for journalists from developing countries, including Belarus, and hoped that such programmes would become a regular feature and that the number of participants would increase. It also looked forward to the training programme of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library for librarians in United Nations-designated depository libraries. Such activities would help strengthen relations between the Department and specific recipients of information in Member States, while also promoting better understanding of the achievements of the United Nations and of the problems it faced.

23. Belarus supported efforts to integrate United Nations information centres into UNDP field offices, although it agreed that the specific circumstances in each case, as well as the views of the host countries, should be taken into account. The United Nations division established recently in Minsk had included an information component from the outset which was playing an increasingly prominent role in the development of information in the Republic and in the establishment of a dialogue between the United Nations and various organizations and departments in Belarus. Information centres in countries with transitional economies were often the only source of information about the United Nations.

24. His delegation supported the efforts of the Department to publicize United Nations peace-keeping activities; the exchange and dissemination of accurate and reliable information on those activities, especially in the regions concerned, were of vital importance for the success of peace-keeping missions, and could help establish an atmosphere of trust and mutual understanding among peoples and States, promote the reconciliation of the hostile parties and prevent further conflict. His delegation welcomed the work of the Department in issuing publications on individual peace-keeping operations, which would undoubtedly contribute to an adequate and unprejudiced understanding both by the public and by Member States of the new role that was being played by the Organization in the maintenance of international peace and security. That was particularly important for Belarus at the current stage, since it was working out specific modalities for its participation in peace-keeping operations.

25. His delegation welcomed the inclusion, in paragraph 23 of draft resolution B, of a reference to the request to consider the development and implementation of a system-wide programme for the tenth anniversary in 1996 of the Chernobyl disaster. Belarus believed that the peoples of the world should learn as much as possible about the disaster and its consequences. The formulation of paragraph 23 committed the Department to develop a programme of specific measures for the anniversary; his Government was prepared to provide all possible support for the conduct of such measures.

26. Mr. CISSÉ (Senegal) said that technology had shrunk the world to a global village in which information and communication knew no boundaries. But that technology was far from being within the grasp of all countries, and those which

had it were in a position to exploit information in their own interests. The information revolution would not be fully international until the developing countries in general, and those in Africa in particular, possessed the technical means to reach the broadest possible public in their own countries. Senegal had always placed great value on individual freedoms, including freedom of the press. His delegation believed that a free and independent press helped to release the creative energy of the people and that any initiative in that direction should be encouraged.

27. Despite of the spread of democracy, journalists in many parts of the world were still being persecuted. Against that background, his delegation welcomed the seminars organized by UNESCO and UNDP in support of an independent and pluralistic press, such as the seminar recently held in Chile resulting in the Declaration of Santiago.

28. His delegation had been interested to hear about the work of the Department of Public Information aimed at reaching a wider public through the use of computerized information networks. It also felt that greater use could be made of the Department's skill and experience in the area of peace-keeping operations. With the end of the cold war, the resources thereby freed could be used for nobler goals, including dissemination of information. Africa, the continent least equipped structurally, was confident that international solidarity would enable it to improve its technology in the information field.

29. On the issue of integration of United Nations information centres with UNDP field offices, his delegation feared that the development component would be emphasized to the detriment of the information component. Information and education were two intimately linked concepts. For developing countries, particularly those in Africa, a lesser emphasis on information would deprive some populations of the fundamental right to information, to training, indeed to knowledge.

30. Mr. CHAUDRY (Pakistan) said that in the aftermath of the cold war, greater good will and cooperation among Member States had led to a smaller, more interdependent world, a development that could be attributed to a large extent to information and communication. However, much remained to be accomplished in order to consolidate those gains. The enormous financial and technological resources of developed countries allowed them to dominate the flow of information, particularly in the field of satellite communications. The world had thus become increasingly unidirectional in the flow of information, views, perceptions and even knowledge. Pakistan was keenly aware of the need for a two-way flow of information in order for the developing countries to share their experiences with the rest of the world and communicate the richness of human diversity. The end of global ideological conflict presented a unique opportunity for developed and developing countries to form a partnership in pursuit of a new world information order. That would involve transferring technology, sharing professional expertise, and promoting a two-way flow of information, leading to understanding between societies with diverse cultural and social values.

31. His delegation supported the recommendations of the Committee on Information on the work of the Department of Public Information. It asked the Department to continue its efforts to ensure timely production of its mandated publications, particularly Development Forum, which it believed would be a useful part of the Department's promotional programme for the 1995 World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women.

32. Pakistan fully supported freedom of information and expression, and those rights were also guaranteed by its Constitution. His Government had initiated privatization of some government-managed newspapers and was taking steps to enlarge the freedom of the electronic media and to turn Pakistan Television and the Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation into fully autonomous institutions. Leading international television services such as those of Cable News Network (CNN) and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) were now available in Pakistan.

33. With the dramatic increase in the number of peace-keeping operations, the Department needed to provide information on those operations on a sustained basis, since such information could be vital in forming a positive world opinion, both in the troop-contributing countries and in countries where peace-keeping missions were conducted.

34. His delegation hoped that coverage of events such as the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in June 1993 and the fifteenth session of the Commission on Human Rights in 1994 would not distract attention from dissemination of objective information on human rights violations occurring in various parts of the world, in particular the disputed State of Jammu and Kashmir, where troops and paramilitary forces were engaged in a reign of terror directed against people fighting for their right to self-determination.

35. His delegation believed that the United Nations information centres around the world were performing an essential role in projecting the image and reporting the activities of the United Nations. It was concerned about the impact of the decision to integrate the information centres with other United Nations field offices. He hoped that the considered views of the Member States reported in document A/49/21 would be heeded.

36. In conclusion, his delegation urged the adoption of the two resolutions recommended by the Committee on Information.

37. Mr. EKOUMILONG (Cameroon) said that while his delegation supported the statement made by Algeria on behalf of the Group of 77, it nevertheless wished to express certain concerns to the Committee. It was evident from the Secretary-General's report (A/49/385) that increasing importance was being accorded to questions of information, necessitating constant adaptation of the United Nations strategy. His delegation welcomed the progress made in the area of information because of the pressing needs of the developing countries confronted with problems of social unrest arising from structural adjustment policies and the fragile transition to democracy. The United Nations could

contribute substantially by alerting the international community to these problems through the dissemination of accurate and equitable information.

38. He commended the efforts of the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information, who had infused the Department of Public Information with a new spirit that was already producing results. He also welcomed the improvement in the technological resources of the Department, resulting in a speedier dissemination of information throughout the world, particularly through the United Nations information centres, which were of vital importance to most countries without adequate means of access to information or publication. The centres had also benefited from a streamlining of their publication procedures and in some cases from a rotation of posts. Others, however, had been left as a result with vacancies at the Director level, among them the centre at Yaoundé in Cameroon, and it was to be hoped that the problems could be resolved through consultations.

39. In view of the eradication of apartheid and the encouraging developments in the Middle East, his delegation hoped that resources formerly devoted to those problems could be redirected to economic and social development, the spread of democracy, the promotion of human rights, peacemaking and peace-keeping, which called for the urgent attention of the Organization. He was pleased to note that the Secretary-General had assigned high priority to the issues set forth in the Agenda for Peace and the Agenda for Development.

40. He noted that the delegations were far from unanimous on the issue of the integration of United Nations information centres with the UNDP field offices. Despite the need for the United Nations to present a unified image and the need to economize, a large majority of Member States remained sceptical as to the wisdom of such integration. While expressing its entire confidence in the Department of Public Information, his delegation believed that in the absence of a clear mandate from the General Assembly the integration of information centres should proceed only on a case-by-case basis after consultation with Member States, particularly those without advanced technological resources in the field of information. His delegation questioned the soundness of the financial argument and feared that the efficiency of the integrated centres might be compromised, because the Directors of the UNDP field offices were not necessarily information professionals and were already burdened with responsibility for a whole complex of activities. The financial argument might be met by pursuing the present policy of withdrawing from expensive leases and by housing different agencies of the United Nations in the field at the same locations while allowing each to preserve its functional autonomy.

41. His delegation attached great importance to the Department's radio programmes as the most effective means of reaching a vast audience even in the remotest parts of the globe. The United Nations radio system should be further improved by cooperation with the radio broadcasting systems of Member States.

42. Cameroon, which had undergone profound democratic changes in recent years, also believed in the virtues of pluralism in the field of information. It supported all actions by the Department of Public Information, the developed

countries and governmental and non-governmental organizations to improve the human and material resources of the developing countries in the field of information.

43. Mr. AZAM (Bangladesh) endorsed the statement made by the representative of Algeria on behalf of the Group of 77.

44. Bangladesh was a major troop-contributing country to the United Nations peace-keeping operations, and its people were naturally interested in the outcome. It was important for them to learn about United Nations policies, programmes and activities in the field of international peace, security and development in a timely fashion, because support for the United Nations at the grass-roots level depended largely on public awareness and appreciation. United Nations information activities could only reach the 110 million people of Bangladesh through the Dhaka United Nations Information Centre (UNIC). The centre had been without a director for the last few years, and his delegation urged that the vacancy be filled.

45. Bangladesh attached the highest importance to freedom of the press as the vehicle of development and the guarantor of democracy. There were around 1,218 newspapers and periodicals in Bangladesh. Several international wire services had offices in Dhaka. CNN and BBC television also operated in the country. His delegation hoped that the Department of Public Information and UNESCO would take initiatives to improve the country's information infrastructure and capabilities by providing adequate training and technology. Looking towards the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations next year, he suggested that the Department might consider establishing a fiftieth anniversary commemorative fellowship for young professional journalists from developing countries, under which two or three young journalists would be invited to New York during the first four weeks of the General Assembly.

46. He hoped that the Committee would adopt the two draft resolutions before it by consensus.

47. Mr. RODRIGUE (Haiti) said that his delegation supported the statement made by the representative of Algeria on behalf of the Group of 77.

48. His Government attached great importance to questions of information. When President Aristide returned to Haiti on 15 October, he had found a country ravaged by three years of military dictatorship during which freedom of expression, of the press and of information had been systematically destroyed. His delegation wished to honour the members of the press who had fallen victim to repression during that tragic period in Haiti.

49. His delegation welcomed the end of apartheid in South Africa and the progress made in the search for a solution to the Middle East conflict; the Department of Public Information deserved particular credit for its contribution to those achievements. The resources formerly devoted to the struggle against apartheid could now be redeployed for other aims, including preservation of the

environment and the spread of democracy and freedom of the press and information.

50. The spectacular developments in communications technology had not diminished the importance of the United Nations information centres, which remained the showcase of the United Nations to the world. While not opposed to the idea of integrating the centres into UNDP offices, his delegation felt that it should be considered carefully on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the country concerned. In any case the process should not obscure the need to open an information centre in Port-au-Prince, where it would serve as the eye of the United Nations and hence protect against backsliding by the opponents of democracy. While the concept of presenting a unified image of the United Nations was a sound one, it should not take precedence over real problems. What was important was freedom of information, and that each agency should carry out its mandate fully and completely.

51. His delegation fully supported the work done by the Department of Public Information in the past year. The Department had helped to disseminate information about the crisis in Haiti and to inform public opinion of the values that his Government had struggled to promote during its exile, namely democracy and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. As the only French/Creole-speaking country in a Spanish- and English-speaking hemisphere, Haiti was seeking to retain its cultural identity and hoped to benefit from programmes adapted to its specific needs.

52. The United Nations was active in Haiti in a number of fields, and in order for its activities to succeed, great emphasis must be placed on information. An information component was essential in the deployment of the United Nations mission in Haiti and in the redeployment of the International Civilian Mission in Haiti. His delegation shared the view of Canada that the United Nations had missed an opportunity to promote democratic development in Haiti by not contributing to the establishment of a radio station, and hoped that such action could be included in the plan of assistance to the country in restoring its national media.

53. Mr. ABIBI (Congo) commended the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information on the quality of the documentation before the Committee. His delegation fully subscribed to the conclusions contained in the report of the Committee on Information (A/49/21), and supported the two draft resolutions. It was important to end existing disparities between developed and developing countries concerning information.

54. The United Nations had a particular responsibility to guarantee the diversity of sources of information, and hoped the Department of Information should therefore increase its cooperation with UNESCO in order to counteract the risk of increasing homogenization which could only impoverish world culture and, at the same time, restrict developing countries to the role of consumers of information.

55. He wished to draw attention to the situation relating to the United Nations Information Centre in Brazzaville, which, despite its impressive record, had been without a Director for several years. The situation in his country had made a nomination difficult, but more than a year ago his Government had given approval to the Department of Public Information for the nomination of a new Director of the Brazzaville Centre. Despite its modest means, the Congo had assumed its responsibilities by making appropriate premises available for the Centre. However, there no longer seemed to be any budgetary provision for the Centre to exist. He found that inexplicable, since the cost of peace-keeping operations, which were more and more numerous in the region, the status of the Republic of Congo as a troop-contributor, and the approach of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations made it essential for the level of services at the Centre to be significantly improved, in order to give the general public a better impression of the United Nations. For that reason, his Government requested the Department of Public Information to do all that was necessary to bring the Brazzaville Centre to the same level of efficiency as the centres in neighbouring countries, by appointing to it a full-time Director.

56. Mr. IDRIS (Sudan) commended the activities of the Department of Public Information over the past year in relation to such topics as Africa's economic situation, peace-keeping and human rights.

57. The Sudan was anxious to maintain its political, social and economic independence, but occasionally found itself the target of hostile foreign propaganda which gave completely the wrong impression of the country. For example, the problem of famine, found only in remote parts of the country under the control of outlaws and rebels, had been greatly distorted, and was alleged to be widespread. The Sudanese Government's supply of food and medicine to those in need in those areas liberated from the rebels had been ignored, as had its loan of vehicles to the United Nations to transport food and medicine to areas under rebel control on the border with Uganda. Hostile propaganda was also directed against the human rights situation in the country, based on the reports of foreigners who knew nothing about the Sudan, or of opposition figures living abroad and exploited by hostile intelligence organizations.

58. The Sudan had welcomed and facilitated the work of all voluntary organizations providing it with humanitarian aid. However, some of those organizations were exploited by duplicitous individuals for very different ends, giving a completely erroneous impression of Sudan. It would have been desirable for the United Nations Information Centre in Khartoum to ensure that such disinformation was not spread to the world. Such disinformation continued to ignore the positive developments in Sudan, such as the huge expansion in land put to agricultural use, the continuous increase in the gross national product, and the distribution of foreign-supplied relief throughout Sudan, using Sudanese Government-owned transport. There was now a train service from the north to south of the country, and a Nile river boat service from Kosti to Juba. Political participation had increased since the introduction of the federal system. The Government had taken steps to staunch the flow of disinformation, using foreign and national media to give regular press conferences and interviews. To enable it to develop its national information resources, he

proposed that training opportunities should be made available to Sudanese nationals so that they could keep abreast of modern technical developments, and that assistance should be given to enable Sudan to modernize its information system.

59. Mr. MWAMBULUKUTU (United Republic of Tanzania) said that consideration of agenda item 80 had been facilitated by the report of the Committee on Information (A/49/21), and that his delegation supported the two draft resolutions. His delegation wished to associate itself with the statement made by the representative of Algeria on behalf of the Group of 77. He agreed with the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information about the importance of informing more people more effectively about the United Nations, and that to succeed in its work, the Department of Public Information needed the support of the Committee on Information.

60. There had been an explosion in information technology; it was unclear, however, how the developing world could benefit from such technology. The Department of Public Information's use of the so-called information superhighway would give 30 million users access to United Nations materials. Africa would, by the year 2000, get the improved telephone service it had long desired, with American Telephone and Telegraph investing US$ 1.5 billion to "ring the continent with a grid of undersea fibre optic cables". However, with that improved service and eventual access to the information superhighway, Africa and the developing countries were entitled to be informed about the benefits to be derived from such technology.

61. Another important issue was that of information regarding United Nations peace-keeping and humanitarian missions. The mainstream media tended to be interested only in the most sensational aspects of any story, ignoring the humanitarian crisis which followed a conflict. The huge influx of refugees from Rwanda and Burundi had had a devastating impact on local communities in the United Republic of Tanzania. In April 1994, over a quarter of a million refugees had entered Ngara District, one of the largest mass movements of refugees in a 24-hour period in history. There were presently 475,000 refugees spread throughout six camps in Kagera region. Such refugee influxes had a negative impact on the natural resource base, local population and social and economic infrastructure. The recently published "Government Assessment Report on the Impact of Refugees on the Local Communities in Kagera and Kigoma Regions", which United Nations agencies, donors and non-governmental organizations had helped to prepare, represented a first step towards soliciting donor support and activities in the refugee affected areas. The need for help in dealing with such crises was one of the reasons which led delegations regularly to call for the improvement of information centres. He therefore appealed to the Department of Public Information to upgrade the centre in Dar es Salaam into a fully fledged United Nations information centre under a full-time director.

62. The fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations in 1995 would provide an appropriate opportunity not only to move towards the new world information and

communications order, but also to hold a world conference on information and development.

63. The CHAIRMAN said that the discussion of agenda item 80 had been concluded, and that the Committee would now take action on the two draft resolutions and the draft decision contained in the report of the Committee on Information, document A/49/21, paragraphs 61 and 62, respectively, and on the oral amendment to the draft decision contained in A/49/21, paragraph 62, proposed by the representative of Ireland at the 10th meeting on 26 October 1994. In the absence of any objection, the decision would read:

> "The General Assembly decides to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 83 to 88 members and decides to appoint Belize, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Kazakhstan and South Africa as members of the Committee on Information."

64. It was so decided.

65. The CHAIRMAN said that in the absence of any objection, he would take it that the Committee agreed to deal with the three drafts at once.

66. It was so decided.

67. Draft resolutions A and B and the draft decision, as orally amended, were adopted without a vote.

68. Mr. SANBAR (Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information to the Special Political and Decolonization Committee) said that, on behalf of the Department of Public Information, he wished to convey his appreciation for the expressions of confidence and support offered by delegations. He would pass on to the staff of the Department of Public Information the warm words of encouragement for their work expressed by the Committee. They would be guided by that positive new spirit as they did their utmost to fulfil the mandates entrusted to them by the General Assembly and respond effectively to the evolving priorities under the guidance of the Secretary-General.

69. He had listened attentively to the views and observations in the general debate and could assure the Committee that, in its search for innovative and creative means of delivering the United Nations message, the Department of Public Information would be greatly assisted by the statements made. He would be pleased to discuss specific ideas and questions with every delegation during the next few weeks. His Department would make every effort to meet the Committee's expectations. His staff was mobilized to work closely with the Committee to communicate an effective, coherent and unified United Nations message. As the Secretary-General had recently pointed out, that message highlighted "the role of the United Nations in the world wide collaborative effort towards enduring human progress".

The meeting rose at 5.25 p.m.

UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly

FORTY-NINTH SESSION

Official Records

SPECIAL POLITICAL AND
DECOLONIZATION COMMITTEE
(FOURTH COMMITTEE)
15th meeting
held on
Tuesday, 1 November 1994
at 3.30 p.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 15th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. HUDYMA (Ukraine)

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AGENDA ITEM 77: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of the publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-794, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

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The meeting was called to order at 3.45 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 77: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST (A/49/13, A/49/288-S/1994/903, A/49/439, A/49/440, A/49/441, A/49/442, A/49/443, A/49/448, A/49/488, A/49/505, A/49/509, A/49/570)

1. Mr. TÜRKMEN (Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)), briefly reviewing what UNRWA had achieved in the previous year, said that the Agency had moved quickly to set up its Peace Implementation Programme (PIP) aimed at a rapid improvement in the socio-economic infrastructure in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. UNRWA was currently handling projects worth approximately $120 million in those areas. Under the first phase of PIP, UNRWA was constructing and renovating schools, health clinics, shelters, women's programme centres and community rehabilitation centres. The second phase of PIP, the purpose of which was to target assistance to those areas where the public sector infrastructure required immediate improvement, had been elaborated in coordination with Palestinian technical and political authorities. Many of the projects were aimed at benefiting the thousands of returnees employed by the Palestinian Authority, including the police force and their families, as well as the environmental health infrastructure. As self-government had progressed in the Gaza Strip and the Jericho area, UNRWA had received numerous ad hoc requests from the Palestinians for assistance, including requests for food, medical supplies and temporary housing, in-service training for public sector teachers, schooling and medical care for returnee families, prefabricated housing for former detainees and donor funds for the salary and recurrent costs of the Palestinian police force. UNRWA had been asked to develop new forms of assistance because other organizations had not been deployed in a substantial operational manner and because UNRWA already had in place systems that could respond rapidly and effectively.

2. He attached special importance to the income-generation and job creation programme based on a revolving fund scheme which had enabled UNRWA to lend more than $3.4 million to approximately 150 small and medium-sized businesses, 43 per cent of which were completely new. UNRWA had also introduced a special small-scale enterprise development programme aimed at very poor women.

3. One of the Agency's main concerns in the health area was the deteriorating environmental situation, especially in the Gaza Strip. Overcrowding in the camps and catchment areas had aggravated existing environmental health conditions by increasing the risk of infection and making it more difficult to provide adequate potable water and sewers. For the long-term survival of the Gaza Strip, it would be necessary to ensure provision of adequate supplies of potable water, improve waste-water management in the camps and municipalities, properly treat and dispose of waste, and install storm-water and sewerage systems. For its part, UNRWA had set up a special environmental health division in Gaza and had conducted feasibility studies, developed appropriate information systems for project planning and design, and initiated environment-related projects and feasibility studies in a number of camps in the Gaza Strip. Money

had also been earmarked for environmental health infrastructure projects in Gaza and the West Bank.

4. UNRWA was making every attempt to ensure that the needs of Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic were not overlooked while attention was being focused on the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

5. Regarding UNRWA's financial situation, he noted that in contrast to the generous flow of funds for projects, contributions to UNRWA's regular and emergency budgets had not been adequate to meet the Agency's recurrent costs. UNRWA had begun 1994 with a deficit of $43 million in its regular and emergency budget, of which $21 million represented funds for the operation of its programmes, mainly salaries for teachers, doctors, nurses, technical staff and others. The austerity measures introduced in 1993 and carried over to the 1994 budget accounted for $22 million. The Agency needed a minimum 5 per cent budget increase each year to cover demographic growth and rising costs, and annual contributions to UNRWA were not even keeping pace with that figure. UNRWA had been able to reduce its deficit to approximately $26.2 million, of which $11.6 million represented items such as the monthly payroll and essential drugs for UNRWA clinics. The 1993 austerity measures accounted for $14.6 million, which also included items such as the hiring of additional teachers to accommodate increased school enrolment and hospitalization costs. UNRWA had exhausted all possibilities open to it to reduce expenditure further; the Agency currently faced the prospect of reducing its $22 million working capital by $11.6 million to cover the monthly payroll and keep the Agency functioning. He appealed to all Governments to find a way of alleviating the Agency's structural deficit problem and helping UNRWA to bring the 1994 deficit down to manageable proportions. If solutions to the financial problems were not forthcoming, installations would have to close down, staff would have to be laid off, and new students might have to be turned away from schools, thus sending an unfortunate message to the refugees at a time when they were expecting to reap the rewards of peace.

6. UNRWA was actively engaged in planning and implementing the move of its headquarters from Vienna to Gaza by the end of 1995. The transfer of its headquarters was leading UNRWA to review possible means of rationalizing Agency operations in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The Agency would initially focus on the administrative integration of certain functions currently being performed separately in its two field offices in Jerusalem and Gaza. Such an approach would not only save funds but would also help the process of integration of services.

7. The prospects for further agreements in the region had induced many donors to focus on UNRWA's life-span. Consensus should emerge among donors, host Governments, the Palestinian Authority and others on a common perception of UNRWA and its future. A framework of five years could usefully be applied to UNRWA, as the successful completion of negotiations would see the phasing out of the Agency's activities. Such a time-frame would allow donor countries, host countries, the Palestinians and others to plan for the coming years so that contributions could be adjusted as appropriate and UNRWA could be assured of a

more stable financial resource base. A review could be undertaken in three years, at which time it would be possible to evaluate more precisely UNRWA's responsibilities in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and whether there could be a different sharing of responsibilities between UNRWA and the Palestinian Authority. The Palestinians might wish to undertake such a review of UNRWA services even earlier with the aim of assuming responsibility for at least some of the Agency services before then. The Agency was fully prepared to discuss matters related to the hand-over process. Since the views expressed by donors, host Governments and others on that issue had not always converged, there was a risk that uncoordinated policies could destabilize services and undermine the Agency's efficiency and effectiveness. He therefore proposed that a meeting should be held in Gaza early in 1995 which would provide an opportunity to clarify positions, prepare the ground for a consensus and prevent the sort of improvisation which would be detrimental to the morale of the refugees and Agency staff.

8. Transferring UNRWA services to the Palestinians involved a complex process of welding two fairly separate structures in education, health, relief and social services. An initial requirement would be a period of harmonization between the services offered by UNRWA and the Palestinian Authority. To that end, joint committees had already been established to address issues such as school curricula, teacher training, immunization policy, mother and child care and family planning, essential drugs, school health services and hospital services. In the social sphere, joint committees were cooperating in poverty alleviation, welfare assistance, social worker training and refugee housing. A gradual hand-over would also involve donors and other institutions with a regional role like the World Bank, all of whom needed to discuss how services thus taken over would be financed.

9. Mr. AASS (Norway), Rapporteur of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA, introducing the report of the Working Group (A/49/570), said that, in accordance with its mandate under General Assembly resolution 48/40 B, the Working Group had continued its efforts, in cooperation with the Secretary-General and the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, for the financing of UNRWA. It had been given a briefing by the Agency's Comptroller on the current financial situation of UNRWA and its needs for 1995. After considering the Comptroller's report at a subsequent meeting, the Working Group had formulated its concluding remarks which appeared in section IV of the report.

10. The Working Group was particularly concerned about the negative cumulative effect of the austerity measures which UNRWA had had to take. It had noted the assessment presented by the Commissioner-General of the contributions required to avoid running down the operational capital reserves and to maintain the standard of services at their current level in order to fund the regular UNRWA budget in 1994 and the Extraordinary Measures in Lebanon and the Occupied Territory.

11. The Working Group commended the Commissioner-General for his fund-raising efforts, and joined UNRWA in expressing appreciation to donors, especially for new or increased contributions. It welcomed the agreement reached by UNRWA with

the Government of Saudi Arabia for the financing of PIP projects in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and hoped that that example would be followed by others among the wealthier States in the region.

12. The Working Group shared the Commissioner-General's concern that the Agency's core activities were being increasingly threatened because of its chronic budget deficit problem, and that there might be insufficient funds to finance some of the PIP programmes. It would be a tragedy if the PIP programmes were undermined by the inability of the international community to provide the resources needed to preserve the regular services of UNRWA at a vital moment in Middle East history.

13. The Working Group supported the Commissioner-General's strict policy of giving priority to operational programmes. It therefore believed that the transfer of the Office's headquarters from Vienna to Gaza should not be financed with funds earmarked for operational programmes at a time when UNRWA had to meet the new needs generated by the establishment of Palestinian self-rule. It requested that a detailed financing plan be drawn up before the transfer took place.

14. The Working Group's conclusions appeared in paragraph 19 of its report. It urged Governments to make new or increased contributions to UNRWA and to make additional contributions in support of ongoing emergency-related and special programmes in Lebanon, PIP activities and construction projects, without decreasing their contributions to the Agency's regular programmes.

15. Ms. ABDELHADY (Observer for Palestine) said that it was important to build on the positive results which had been achieved at the forty-eighth session of the General Assembly, largely because of the balanced and realistic approach taken to UNRWA. The major developments in the peace process were only the first steps in a transitional period on the path towards peace. Negotiation on final status issues, including the issue of the Palestine refugees, would not begin until the second stage. It was imperative to maintain basic positions, firmly based upon the principles of international law.

16. Despite the achievements of the peace process, over 3 million Palestine refugees, including those persons displaced in 1967, remained dispersed throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Jordan, Lebanon, and the Syrian Arab Republic, and elsewhere. Those refugees had been waiting, many for almost half a century, for a just and comprehensive resolution of their plight on the basis of the right of repatriation or compensation in accordance with paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

17. The Agency's contribution towards the goal of peace was unquestionable, and had been recognized by the General Assembly in paragraph 5 of resolution 48/40 A. UNRWA had initiated new programmes and activities: for example, it had provided urgent assistance to the Palestinian Authority in the health sector in Gaza. Once donors had recognized the Agency's experience and rapid response capacity, they had made generous funding available for the newest projects and services under PIP. PIP projects had been undertaken to benefit not only

refugees in the Occupied Territory, but also refugees in the Agency's other three fields of operation, in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. At a time of heightened international attention to developments in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, it was important to give the same attention to the rights and needs of Palestine refugees in the other three areas.

18. Following the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area, UNRWA had begun preparing for an eventual hand-over of its installations, services and programmes to the Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. An agreement, embodied in an exchange of letters, had been reached between UNRWA and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Although the Advisory Commission of UNRWA had entered into a relationship with the PLO, that relationship was not the working relationship mandated in General Assembly decision 48/417. Her delegation expressed appreciation for the Agency's readiness to assist in the disbursement of salaries and other support costs of the Palestinian Police Force.

19. Her delegation agreed with the Commissioner-General that the transfer of UNRWA headquarters from Vienna to the Occupied Territory demonstrated the commitment of the United Nations to making peace a success, as well as the confidence of the United Nations in the Palestinian Authority. At the same time, her delegation affirmed the need for the maintenance of all field offices, especially the field office in Jerusalem.

20. Unfortunately the staff members of UNRWA continued to face difficulties, including arrest, detention, mistreatment and injury, while attempting to carry out their duties. Section IV of the report of the Commissioner-General (A/49/13) dealt with that issue. Problems persisted with regard to the movement of staff members into and out of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, incursions into the Agency's installations, including hospitals and clinics, by Israeli security forces, injury to Agency staff and damage to Agency property. As noted in paragraph 80 of the report, the refugee affairs officers of UNRWA continued to assist in defusing tension and facilitating the delivery of medical services. Her delegation reiterated its belief that the application of international standards of human rights and the applicability to all the Occupied Palestinian Territory of the Fourth Geneva Convention should never be compromised.

21. Her delegation expressed regret about the content of the letter sent by the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations in response to the Secretary-General's efforts to fulfil his reporting responsibilities under General Assembly resolution 48/40. Her delegation welcomed the appointment of a Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories, which highlighted the important role the United Nations could play in the transitional period. She expressed appreciation to all donors to UNRWA and to PIP and urged continued contributions to help ease the financial problems being faced by UNRWA. If UNRWA's services to the Palestine refugees were allowed to deteriorate, that would clearly neither be in the best interests of the refugees nor contribute to the maintenance of stability at a critical stage in the peace process.

22. While the international community should continue to support positive developments in the peace process, it should at the same time reaffirm its position of principle with regard to the rights of the Palestine refugees in accordance with international law, and continue to provide needed assistance to those refugees until a real solution was found. She wished to emphasize the inalienable and individual nature of the rights of Palestine refugees and the need to differentiate between those rights and the right of every single Palestinian to Palestinian nationality and citizenship.

23. Mr. ABU ODEH (Jordan) thanked the Commissioner-General for his report, and UNRWA for its continuing efforts to help the Palestine refugees. The historic developments in the political situation in the Middle East, and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in Gaza and Jericho had presented UNRWA with new challenges, and placed it in a new relationship with the Palestinian people. The social and economic infrastructure developed by UNRWA over the last 40 years would provide the Palestinian Authority with solid foundations on which to build.

24. Although the PLO had agreed with the Israeli Government that the question of the refugees should be left to the final stages of the peace negotiations, Jordan felt it was essential to work towards settling that matter through discussions and multilateral working groups, within the framework of the peace process. About two thirds of the Palestinian people had refugee status, and were very dependent on UNRWA, the Palestinian Authority and the host country Governments.

25. There had been a serious shortfall in contributions to UNRWA, leading to a severe deficit in its budget which he feared would not only lead to a reduction in the services UNRWA was able to provide to the refugees, but would also cause the Palestinians to lose faith in the international community, as represented by UNRWA, at a crucial stage in the peace process.

26. UNRWA's budget deficit also increased the burden on host countries. The budget of the Government of Jordan could not support the cost of the services it was providing to the refugees, which greatly exceeded the contributions of any donor to the agency. The most recent statistics showed that out of a total of 3,006,788 Palestinian refugees, Jordan was accommodating 1,193,539, or almost 40 per cent. However, UNRWA had allocated to its Jordan office only 20 per cent of its 1994 budget of US$ 309.1 million. That meant that Jordan, rather than the international community, had to find the difference in the cost of providing services to Palestinian refugees. Jordan was grateful to the Commissioner-General for the acknowledgement in his report of Jordan's important contribution to the work of the Agency. That acknowledgement, in addition to the severe economic burden placed on Jordan and the pressure upon it to provide essential services for the refugees, should stimulate the international community, as represented by the large donor States, to cooperate with Jordan, in order to enable it to continue providing a decent life for Palestinian refugees, in support of the peace process and security in the whole region.

27. The Secretary-General's decision to transfer UNRWA headquarters to Gaza would benefit the refugees, provide support for social and economic programmes, and facilitate assistance operations in the self-governing areas. The transfer should be made as soon as was consistent with maintaining operational efficiency, but UNRWA should not bear the cost, as that would affect its assistance programmes and increase the burden on host States. The United Nations should assume full responsibility for the transfer costs.

28. In his report covering the period from 1 July 1992 to 30 June 1993 (A/48/13), the Commissioner-General had expressed the hope "that this report covers an era which is gone for ever". Jordan had shared his hope at that time. It now shared the disappointment expressed in his latest report (A/49/13) that that era had not gone for ever, and that there had been an increase in the number of serious and fatal incidents, and of the collective punishments consequent upon them, which increased the suffering of the Palestinian people living under occupation. It was to be hoped that the will of all the interested parties and States in the region, together with the help of the international community, would remove all the causes for the suffering of the Palestinian people, their legitimate national and human rights would be restored to them in their own country, and that that black period would be ended forever.

29. Mr. RUDOLPH (Germany), speaking on behalf of the European Union and Austria, congratulated the Commissioner-General and his staff for their excellent work over the previous 12 months and thanked him and the Secretary-General for their reports. He also thanked the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA for its analysis and recommendations. His delegation deplored that during the period under review UNRWA staff members had fallen victim to the violence in the Territories, and hoped that the further implementation of the agreements and progress in the peace process would diminish and eventually end that violence.

30. The current report of the Commissioner-General covered a period of far-reaching changes which had accelerated with the signing in Washington of the Declaration of Principles between Israel and the PLO, both of which remained committed to the peace process, as was confirmed by the signing of the Agreement on the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area on 4 May 1994 and the early empowerment agreement of 29 August 1994. The conclusion of the Peace Treaty between Israel and Jordan and the progress in the negotiations with the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon had given rise to new hope of positive developments for all the refugees.

31. The Cairo Agreement had made tangible to the people of the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area the promises contained in the Declaration of Principles. A decade of nightly curfews was giving way to a normal social and family life marked by the redeployment of Israeli troops, the arrival of the Palestinian Police Force and steps to set up the Palestinian Authority, all of which was indicative of an emerging new reality.

32. Those transformations posed new tasks and challenges for UNRWA, whose long experience in the region and outstanding operational capability placed it in a

privileged position to accompany and indeed buttress the peace process in the social and economic sector. From the beginning of that process UNRWA had been able to deliver its services in a way that allowed a large part of the Palestinian population to feel the spirit of the new era.

33. The timely launching of the Peace Implementation Programme on 6 October 1993 had been designed to contribute to stabilizing social and economic conditions, especially in the Gaza Strip, although the Commissioner-General had emphasized that those additional endeavours by the Agency should not be limited to Gaza and the West Bank, but be extended also to the Palestinian population of concern to UNRWA in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, an approach which the European Union had strongly supported. The European Union welcomed the swift and positive response of donors to the Peace Implementation Programme, which was a clear sign of trust and confidence in the Agency by the donor community.

34. His delegation also welcomed the Agency's constructive role in assisting the nascent institutions of the Palestinian Authority, to whom the Commissioner-General and his staff should continue to lend their support. During the period covered by the report of the Commissioner-General, coordination of programmes and activities with specialized agencies, including the World Bank, had become increasingly necessary, and his delegation took note of the fruitful dialogue into which the Agency had entered with some of those new players, who had been able to benefit from its experience in the region. In so doing, UNRWA had acted in compliance with General Assembly resolution 48/40 A. The appointment by the Secretary-General of a Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories was an important step in that regard.

35. The same resolution had also requested "that the headquarters of the Agency be transferred as soon as practicable to its area of operations", a request that had been quickly acted upon by the Secretary-General and the Commissioner-General, whose plan envisaged that transfer by the end of 1995. Every precaution should be taken to ensure that the effectiveness of the Agency's operations was not impaired by the transfer, particularly in relation to Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. A detailed financial plan should be produced before the transfer, and its cost should not be defrayed from the Agency's regular budget. The European Union was confident that the Secretary-General and UNRWA would consult fully with donors on those important issues before taking further steps.

36. The European Union and its member States, who were the most important contributors to UNRWA operations during 1993, were deeply concerned about the Agency's financial situation. Despite the freezing of approximately US$ 17 million, the Agency had ended 1993 with a deficit of some US$ 10 million, which had had to be financed out of working capital. The prognosis for 1994 was even worse, and it was untenable that UNRWA's regular programmes should be threatened by structural deficits that would send a wrong signal to the region. His delegation called upon States that had contributed in the past to continue to do so, and on those that had not to reconsider their position. His delegation noted with particular satisfaction the recent generous contribution

by the Government of Saudi Arabia, whose example all the States in the region should follow in a spirit of regional solidarity.

37. In allowing the refugees to keep up their hope of a normal life the Agency performed the essential task of assisting those who sought peace and diminishing the numbers of those tempted by violence. The United Nations would bear a heavy responsibility if it refused to provide the Agency with the means necessary to fulfil its mission.

38. Mr. MOHAMED (Bahrain) said that his Government had welcomed developments since the Madrid Conference in 1991 as steps towards a comprehensive and just settlement in the Middle East. Those developments would have a profound effect upon the work of the United Nations with regard to the Palestinian question, and on UNRWA. Since October 1993, UNRWA had coordinated its activities with the peace process, holding consultations with the PLO and the major contributors to the Agency. One of its most important goals was to strengthen infrastructure in education, health, environment, assistance programmes and social services. The implementation of such programmes would provide employment opportunities for many unemployed Palestinians, which could be a positive contribution to the peace process.

39. However, UNRWA was faced with the serious problem of a budget deficit which had compelled it to take a number of economy measures. His Government had made token contributions to UNRWA in the past few years in order to participate in its work. He hoped that UNRWA would pay increased attention to Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, since ignoring their needs would have negative effects on the peace process.

40. Mr. BATU (Turkey) thanked the Commissioner-General of UNRWA and his staff for their excellent report on the Agency's work and expressed his appreciation to the Commissioner-General for his statement describing the Agency's efforts on behalf of over 3 million Palestinian refugees, despite serious financial difficulties.

41. Rather than reducing UNRWA's task, the positive developments in the Middle East peace process had made it more complex. The establishment of the Palestinian Authority in the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area and the anticipated extension of self-rule to the rest of the West Bank had ushered in a new era in UNRWA's relationship with the Palestinian people. In addition to providing the services it had supplied for over 40 years, UNRWA was due to begin preparing to hand over its installations, services and programmes to the Palestinian people in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip; it would also focus considerable energy on the forthcoming transfer of its headquarters from Vienna to the Gaza Strip, following the decision by the Secretary-General. His delegation believed that the best solution to the question of that transfer, including financial aspects, could be reached through consultations between the members of UNRWA's Advisory Commission and the Commissioner-General.

42. In his capacity as Chairman of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA, he was fully aware of the financial problems posed for the Agency by its 1993

budget deficit of US$ 10 million, and by the estimated 1994 cash shortfall of US$ 43 million in its regular and emergency budgets. The new challenges and responsibilities that UNRWA would be shouldering should be matched by financial support from the international community, who shared common responsibility for its task. He commended the Commissioner-General's efforts to raise funds and explain the Agency's problems and prospects, and expressed the hope that the example set by some donors would be followed by others.

43. The Israeli-Palestinian and Israel-Jordan agreements had opened up a new era of reconciliation and hope which would undoubtedly have positive ramifications on a much wider regional and global scale. The establishment of permanent peace in the Middle East would also create the conditions for harmony, economic cooperation and prosperity. As a neighbour of the Middle East, Turkey had supported the just cause of the Palestinian people from the very beginning. It had also supported the peace process based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). The Palestinian people more than ever required the assistance of the international community, and at the beginning of 1994, Turkey had donated the sum of US$ 2 million to meet their immediate needs, and had also pledged an Eximbank loan of US$ 50 million for investments in Gaza and the Jericho Area. Turkey had also contributed US$ 100,000 to UNRWA's budget for the transfer of its headquarters to Gaza, and was still considering additional contributions. Lastly, a Turkish trade mission had recently paid a visit to Gaza and the Jericho Area to examine the possibilities for cooperation.

44. Mr. GNEHM (United States of America) reaffirmed the strong support of the United States for the work of UNRWA, in particular for its Peace Implementation Programme, and for the leadership of the Commissioner-General. As UNRWA's largest single donor, and a co-sponsor of the Madrid process, the United States was pleased to see UNRWA working to implement the peace process agreements.

45. The United States noted the substantial progress in the peace process and endorsed the decision by the Secretary-General to move UNRWA headquarters from Vienna to Gaza by the end of 1995. The United States was reviewing the financing of that transfer in consultation with other members of UNRWA's Advisory Commission and other major donors.

46. The coming year promised even more rapid change than the previous one, and his delegation looked forward to continued efforts by UNRWA to adapt in order to meet the changing needs of the Palestinian refugee community throughout the region. His delegation noted that "the Agency would soon begin a process of preparation for the eventual hand-over of its installations, services and programmes to the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip". The Government of the United States strongly supported that process and looked forward to further information about UNRWA's planning and to assisting it to achieve that important goal.

47. Lastly, he expressed the hope that all parties and the international community would continue to extend their cooperation and expertise to UNRWA as it played its part in reaching a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

48. Mr. ABOUL NASR (Observer for the League of Arab States) said that there had been political developments of the utmost importance in the region in the period covered by the report of the Commissioner-General and since that time, and the work of the Agency had entered a completely new era. The Agency's achievements in the fields of education, health and social services under the Peace Implementation Programme it had established in 1993 represented a practical contribution to the ongoing peace process.

49. The League of Arab States, which had welcomed the peace agreements, urged the United Nations and the international community to provide all possible support to the Palestinian Authority in the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area given that the success of the Authority in performing its task would constitute a major step towards a comprehensive settlement. It should not be forgotten that certain fundamental issues remained to be discussed at subsequent stages, including the status of Arab Jerusalem, the removal of the settlements and a just solution to the refugee problem on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions.

50. The reports before the Committee indicated that the Israeli authorities were continuing to obstruct the functioning of the Palestinian Authority and to impose repressive measures that were incompatible with the fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and with the agreements recently concluded. That had caused increased suffering for the Palestinian people and had led to an escalation of violence in the occupied territories that might have a negative effect on the peace process.

51. Despite the contributions made to the Agency over the past year, it continued to suffer from a shortfall in resources and it projected a deficit for 1994 that was twice that for 1993. It would be a tragedy if the social and economic benefits promised by the Peace Implementation Programme should be undermined by the inability of the international community to provide the resources needed at such a vital stage.

52. The Council of the League of Arab States had adopted a resolution in September 1994 recommending that the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine, in cooperation with UNRWA and the countries concerned, should conduct a general census of Palestine refugees, establish an inventory of their property and elaborate a comprehensive scheme for a solution to the problem on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III), and that the Arab countries at the United Nations should support the maintenance of UNRWA until such time as there was a just solution to the refugee problem on the basis of paragraph 11 of that resolution.

The meeting rose at 5.40 p.m.